THE RAGTIME SOCIETY

DEDICATED TO THE PRESERVATION OF CLASSIC RAGTIME

P.O. BOX 8 KING, ONT., CANADA

Vol. 2, No. 5. May-June, 1963.

This issue is late. It is late for two excellent reasons. One, we have been very, very busy in our various day-to-day occupations (I have been travelling in Western Canada, Jim Kinnear has changed his company), and two, because we have been working on our most ambitious project. This project is the first Ragtime Society L.P. record. We will tell you all about our record further on in this Bulletin.

Even though we want to highlight R.S.R. #1, we will cover most of our standard departments. The story on Peter Lunberg's visit is in this issue (courtesy Idamay MacInnes). A reprint of a "New Yorker" article of May 11, 1963, (courtesy Joe Smith). The story of "Ragging the Scale" as told by Eubie Blake to Mike Montgomery.

RECORDS

We have produced our own L.P. record. I say that like a father would say, "I had a baby". Like many of you - Idamay, Jim, and myself have decried the fact that there are all too few good Ragtime records. They are either too fast, too ricky-tick, too arranged, or too technically augmented. A number of months ago I was talking to Mike Montgomery in Detroit. He told me about his friend Tom Shea. Tom not only played Ragtime but composed it as well. He had good classical training and got bitten when he saw "Those Wonderful Ragtime Years". As he didn't have any sheet music, he composed his own rags. Jim Kinnear saw Tom and Mike, and I heard a tape of Tom playing. We were all overwhelmed. I was so overwhelmed that I 'phoned Max Morath in Denver and played part of the tape to him. (Max, that was an expensive call). We talked Tom into coming to Toronto and cutting the master tape for The Ragtime Society's first record, R.S.R. #1. I know we are prejudiced, but we all think it is a masterpiece. As you all know, The Society is no moneymaker and we went into hock over this record because we felt that Tom was just too great to remain hidden.

The Society has this record in stock now. We hope to get out from under financially at $5.00 a record. We feel that you all should have this L.P. It is, in my opinion, a milestone in Ragtime records. We feel that you will want to tell as many people as you can about it. It is what Ragtime should sound like. One side is made up of Tom's own compositions, and the other side of well known tunes. We don't usually push our own stuff so aggressively, but - you should all buy this record. It is technically well recorded - we feel attractively packaged - and a gas to listen to. If this one goes we will produce more Ragtime Society records. Again, the price is $5.00 postpaid in U.S. and Canada.

The record contains thirteen tunes, and is entitled "Classic and Modern Rags" by Tom Shea. R.S.R. #1.

Side A	Side B
SPASM RAG	STOPTIME RAG
HASTY PUDDING	EUPHONIC SOUNDS
VENIAL SIN	ST. LOUIS RAG
JOHNNY WALKER RAG	SOMETHING DOING
PRAIRIE QUEEN	[redacted]
BLACK MIKE'S CURSE	PINEAPPLE RAG
THE STORYVILLE SPORT	ORIGINAL RAGS

We can't wax poetic enough about Tom's own compositions. Every one is amazing. They contain completely new ideas - but all within the traditional framework. It is hard to single out any one number as the best. "Spasm Rag" you will never forget, but the same goes for "Prairie Queen". Tom is another Joseph Lamb (the composer), another Bob Darch, John Maddox, and Max Morath (the player). We feel we have produced a classic - we know you will agree.

"The Fingerbuster", by Ron Weatherburn

Now that R.S.R. #1 has been produced (as above) we are pleased to announce next month's L.P. record, which will be ready for mailing in approximately two weeks after receipt of this Bulletin. We have made arrangements with Mobile Sound of London, England, to have this record pressed here, and we mentioned it in our March Newsletter, Vol. 2, No. 3.

We want to thank all those of you who wrote us expressing your interest in this record, and would only like to add that this is the time to send your money. $5.00 brings you the record, postpaid in Canada and the U.S.A. only.

The quality of sound on this record is not as good as it might be, but then perhaps future ones will be better. Ron Weatherburn writes that he has some interesting L.P.'s coming up in the very near future and will keep us posted. He also states that, as we suspected, critics in England (as here) tend to rate high fidelity of sound above the performer's integrity.

PERFORMERS

Percy Franks, The Last of the Ragtime Kids, has been at it a good many years. He started on the piano in Chicago in 1911 at the Barry Theatre, playing for the silent movies. The following year he graduated to piano at a burlesque show in Riverview Park. In 1913 he played calliope ..... (how many of you readers have ever played calliope? Ed.) During the course of the next few years he played many resorts .... Coney Island, Pallisades Park, etc., both piano and calliope. In 1918 he started working for various music publishing firms, quitting show business, and for the next 39 years he travelled for the P. Lorillard Co. Since 1957 he has been back in show business and his next engagement is at the Red Slipper, Cherry Creek Inn, Denver, starting July 15th. We haven't heard Percy, but we understand he pounds a mean keyboard.

SHEET MUSIC DEPARTMENT

Sales of sheet music picked up slightly after our last blast about procrastination, and this of course enables us to do more with Society funds. This month however, our entire spare time has been taken up with the production of not one but two L.P.'s. (Divorces amongst the Society's executive have been kept to a minimum!) And this has meant that it has just not been possible to put the time into turning out a new piece of sheet music. We will, however, for once, deviate from our recently announced new policy and state that next month we will print "Palm Leaf Rag" by Scott Joplin. This is one of Joplin's earlier numbers, is very melodic, and not difficult to play.

"Palm Leaf Rag" - $1.00. Delivery in approximately one month.

The green sheet which went out with our February Newsletter, lists all the available sheet music we can supply ..... changes and deletions from that list will be printed. In the meantime, we have a stock of all that material for immediate delivery. Last month we announced the recent acquisition of seven Jelly Roll Morton numbers, and the sale of this material has been reasonably brisk.

In a recent issue we mentioned the existence of the National Sheet Music Society, Inc. They put out a monthly newsletter to their members, and the cost of this subscription is only $1.00. They do not publish in June, July, or August, but your dollar sent to MUSIGRAM, 5010 Reeder Ave., Covina, California, will start your subscription in September. The Society is a non-profit organization serving collectors and students of printed Americana.

Bill Western of Northfield, Minnesota, suggests that we should describe our sheet music offerings in greater detail. While this is a worthwhile suggestion, we had thought that most students of Ragtime surely would have in their possession the 'Bible' of Ragtime, namely, "They All Played Ragtime", and would have committed this volume to memory. Since the 'Bible' contains descriptions of nearly all Joplin's rags, and a good many of Scott's and Lamb's, we have always felt it unnecessary to repeat them.

FOLIOS:

1. We have no further news from Max Morath on his book of 100 best rags. Many of you have asked us about them, but we have nothing to relate at this time, except that the project is proceeding.

2. There is no further news from Melrose on their projected ragtime folio.

3. There is only silence from Mills Music on their rumoured ragtime folio.

PLAYER PIANO ROLLS, ETC.

"Rebuilding the Player Piano" by Larry Givens, may be obtained from The Vestal Press, 3533 Stratford Drive, Vestal, N.Y. Larry Givens, whose name must be familiar to many of our subscribers, is an acknowledged expert on the repair and rebuilding of many types of mechanical music

instruments, and owns what is undoubtedly the most fabulous collection of machines in existence to-day. We have not yet seen a copy of his book, which runs to 176 pages, but knowing something of Larry's thoroughness believe we state with impunity that $6.95 for postpaid delivery is a bargain. Vestal Press are the publishers of "Player Piano Treasury", as well as this new book.

We understand that Larry has a few re-issues of some very early rag rolls. Write him at R.D. #1, Wexford, Pennsylvania, for particulars.

MUSIC TREASURE, Box 596, Bellevue, Nebraska. This is where you can write to have your name put on Bill Stewart's mailing list. So, why should you want to be on Bill Stewart's mailing list? Because if you are looking for old rolls, and can't find any, this is how to get them. Bill conducts a regular auction service by mail, and his mailouts contain complete descriptions of about one thousand rolls. Bill is determined to give good service, and our dealings with him so far have been excellent. Those of you who are looking for rolls, should write Bill at the above address. Tell him we sent you.

Pat Cather of 314 Windsor Drive, Birmingham 9, Alabama, has for sale re-issues of Jazz rolls played by such artists as Morton, Waller, Johnson, etc. No rags that we could see, but Pat tells us perhaps in the future.

L.P. RECORDS, CONTINUED.

We have heard from both Vincent Terbois in Switzerland, and Henri Parisot in Paris, where the Vintage Jazz Music Society Records have issued a 12" L.P. containing seventeen rags and cakewalks recorded in the early years by Ossman, Sousa, Pryor, and other soloists and orchestras. If interested, write to VJMS, 32 Kenton Lane, Kenton, Harrow, Middlesex, England.

NEW SUBSCRIBERS

Master Andrew M. Pope of Vallejo, California, aged 10, has sent in his request for membership along with a manuscript of his own composition entitled, "Molasses Rag", which turns out to be a nicely syncopated rag written for a ten year old size hand. Congratulations Andrew, and keep up the good work!

Ray Smith of South Harrow, Middlesex, England, tells us that he is currently playing with a New Orleans style group, and they hope to make an L.P. soon of Ragtime. They are adding more Ragtime to their repertoire, ably assisted, no doubt, by Smitty.

Lawrence K. Brown of 129-A South Reeves Drive, Beverley Hills, Calif., asks us to put him in touch with someone who is capable of writing down the piano solo from an L.P. of orchestra and piano. He would like to have it "note for note" exactly as played. If you know of someone, please write Lawrence directly.

THE LUNDBERG STORY

A 'Ragtime First' describes the trip to America made by Peter Lundberg and his mother, from Goteborg, Sweden. After a two and a half month trip across the United States, Peter and his mother came to Toronto in mid-April.

It was utterly fascinating to follow their 'Ragtime Itinerary', and to hear of their visits with all the greats! - Bob Darch, Max Morath, Johnny Maddox, Charlie Thompson, the enthusiastic group in St. Louis, and any other living ragophile mentioned in "They All Played Ragtime"!

There was a delightful little aside in Washington when the cab driver took Peter to the Library of Congress. He spent most of the day playing Classic Ragtime on a Steinway. When the cab driver picked the Lundbergs up to go to the airport, he was disturbed that they came all the way to Washington and hadn't seen one monument!

Johnny Maddox was at Club 76, and Peter had previously met him in Denver with Max Morath, so he was delighted to have another visit. Peter played several numbers at the Club. He also saw the Pierre Berton T.V. interview with John Fisher and Johnny Maddox.

We had a busy three days - played lots of two-piano Ragtime at the MacInneses, visited Ports of Call, Granite Club, Club 76, and saw some of the country near Toronto while visiting the Kinnears. After Toronto, the Lundbergs went to New England, then on to New York to visit Mrs. Joe Lamb. We have since heard that Melie Lamb was delighted with their visit.

Peter has great talent. He has a fine classic interpretation of Ragtime. We wish there weren't an ocean between us - we would like to hear more of his playing.

We thoroughly enjoyed the visits with the Lundbergs - they were delightful!

Idamay MacInnes.

P.S. by Jim Kinnear:-

If anything, Peter was perhaps a little modest when speaking of his ability. But then he really didn't have to say too much because his hands on the keyboard spoke more eloquently. We have had a note from Peter since his return to Sweden, and are glad to know that his three-month trip was a success in every way. He tells us that there is a good possibility that he will be able to develop interest in Ragtime with the Swedish Radio and Television people, and towards this end he is working on a TV script.

Bill Mitchell of Downey, California, has also commented on his pleasant meeting with Peter and his mother. Bill and the Lundbergs went to Bob McWhirter's house, where they heard Fred Hoeptner play his composition "Sedalia Rag". Bill has this to say (and we heartily concur): "Peter is a terrific pianist and remarkably well versed in traditional piano styles. As well as playing confident and authoritative Ragtime, he plays fine blues piano and can hit a good Harlem stride as well".

Special to the Ragtime Society

THE STORY OF "RAGGING THE SCALE"

as told by Eubie Blake to Mike Montgomery

(In June, 1961, I was in New York City on business and made it a point to visit Eubie Blake to talk about the piano rolls he made and the Good Old Days in general. Len Kunstadt of Record Research Magazine was with me.

Eubie recalled many yarns that evening, one of special interest to ragtime lovers -- the story of the composition "Ragging the Scale.")

Back in the old days in Baltimore, the folks -- especially womenfolks -- liked to go to upstairs bars on Sundays to drink. One Sunday, one of these women asked pianist Hughie Woolford to play "Hosannah" ("Jerusalem"). Hughie played something he claimed was "Hosannah" but he actually had played something else instead.

Eubie Blake was present that day and procedded to play the correct tune for the lady as it should be played -- as a spiritual. Later he remarked to Hughie, "Hell, man -- if someone asked you to play the scale you'd play it in ragtime!"

The next day Hughie came back to the bar and played ragtime scales for Eubie, but only in one key. Eubie took the tune, dressed it up and played it in six or seven keys.

Word got around that Eubie was playing Hughie's tune, but whenever Hughie confronted him, Eubie always minimized what he was doing.

Later Eubie was urged to go to New York City and play the tune for the Joseph Stern Publishing Co., which he did. A man named Dominic Salavino (sp?) who was present admitted the tune was good, but he said to Mr. Stern, "Who else could play it besides Eubie and one or two others?"

The tune was later issued under the title "Ragging the Scale" and had Edward B. Claypoole's name on it as composer. (Ed was white, incidentally.)

Eubie never got any money or credit for the tune, but as he himself said, "I planted the seeds!"

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Following is a list of most of the player piano rolls issued of "Ragging the Scale" from about 1915 to 1919. Rolls with no artists listed are arranged rolls. (All are 88-note rolls.)

Artempo 5052, 50525 and 13205, played by Dave Kaplan
Artrio-Angelus 7550, played by William E. Berge
Autokrat 60075 and 26053

Connorized 3117

DeLuxe 15165

Harmony 110923 (Montgomery Ward roll)

Ideal 02410 (and 2410), played by J. Caldwell Atkinson
Imperial 55530, played by Zema Randale

Metro-Art (and Metrostyle Themodist) 300642
Metrostyle 302196

Orient 2186

Perfection 86604, played by Joseph J. Fecher
Perfection 86400
Pianostyle 35170

QRS 100263, played by Charley Straight (says the roll. A 1920 QRS catalog says this roll is played by Harold Weber. Possibly there are two arrangements of the tune using the same number.)
QRS 6236, played by Max Kortlander - Instrumental. (Released September, 1935)

Rhythmodik A13172, played by Pete Wendling
Rolla-Artis 50155, played by Clarence Jones

US Music 7590B

Vocalstyle 50015, played by Hilda Wehmeier
Voltem (Angelus) 0826, played by William E. Berge (probably same as Artrio-Angelus 7550)

JAZZ RECORDS

Supreme Tickler

FAULTY history, like the sea turtle, is long-lived. Thus it has become clear only in the past decade that the up-the-river-from-New Orleans story is merely a rib or two of jazz history. Long before this overcelebrated migration, itinerant blues guitarists and pianists washed back and forth across the Southwest, the Southeast, and the Midwest. Jelly Roll Morton, a one-man vanguard, had travelled from coast to coast, sowing as he went, and by the time the New Orleans-to-Chicago migration was complete, independent and equally important jazz movements were entrenched in Kansas City, the Southwest, Baltimore, and New York. Perhaps the most influential and undervalued of these movements involved the Harlem "stride" pianists, who began to appear during the First World War and flourished in the twenties and thirties. Stride piano is characterized chiefly by an oompah left hand (a two-beat seesaw, whose ends are a powerful mid-keyboard chord and a weaker single note played an octave or a tenth below) and by an arabesque of right-hand chords and arpeggios, fashioned in counter rhythms. Stride piano, unlike New Orleans jazz, did not pop from one mythical man's forehead. It grew slowly out of ragtime, a unique piano form that lasted from about 1900 to about 1920. Though ragtime had similar features, it was not jazz. It was a complex, rococo *composed* music that evolved, as far as anyone knows, from the music used in the eighties and nineties to accompany Southern dances like the cakewalk. It employed the oompah left hand, syncopation, and elaborate treble figures, and each number was built on three or four distinct themes, arranged in *abacd*, *abcd*, or rondo form. It was a brittle, spirited, elegant music, which had considerable lyric charm, and in its highest form (the work of Scott Joplin, James Scott, and Joseph Lamb) it demanded a Lisztian technique. Recorded on widely bought piano rolls, it was the first machine-fostered musical fad. It was also the first musical fad to be destroyed by overexposure. (Its lack of development helped cause its death, too; the late rags, though often fancier, do not differ much from those written in 1900.) The stride pianists, however, were busy remodelling ragtime long before it sank, and by the time it did they had perfected a full-bodied replacement—an improvised music, at once telescoped and loosened. The multiple themes of the typical ragtime composition gave way to the *aaba* structure of the thirty-two-bar chorus; the oompah left hand was supplemented by four-four chords, broken-rhythm chords, and single-note melodic lines; the right-hand figures became less garrulous; longer rests and behind-the-beat legato phrases were added; and there were fewer tremolos and trills, although the arpeggios and sudden breaks persisted. Like the ragtime pianists, the stride men were orchestral pianists, and they most often played by themselves or in "cutting" contests, which took place in cabarets, in back rooms, and at rent parties. (The open-house rent party, which was held in Harlem apartments in the twenties and thirties, was a noble if mysterious economic-social function. Its twin purposes were to raise rent money through a fifty-cent-or-so admission charge and to supply as many people as could be squeezed in with continuous music and all they could eat and drink. How the host made a profit—he apparently did—has never been explained.) At their height, the stride pianists formed a glittering, ritualistic duchy. James P. Johnson, the dean of the Harlem "ticklers" (one of those *mots justes* that only jazz musicians seem able to fashion about their music), recalled several of its rules of etiquette in the *Jazz Review* a couple of years before his death, in 1955:

> When a real smart tickler would enter a place, say in winter, he'd leave his overcoat on and keep his hat on, too. We used to wear military overcoats or what was called a Peddock Coat, like a coachman's; a blue double-breasted, fitted to the waist and with long skirts. We'd wear a light pearl-gray Fulton or Homburg hat with three buttons or eyelets on the side, set at a rakish angle. . . . Then a white silk muffler and a white silk handkerchief in the overcoat's breast pocket. Some carried a gold-headed cane, or if they were wearing a cutaway, a silver-headed cane. A couple of fellows used to wear Inverness capes, which were in style in white society then. . . .
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> When you came into a place you had a three-way play. You never took your overcoat or hat off until you were at the piano. First you laid your cane on the music rack. Then you took off your overcoat, folded it and put it on the piano, with the lining showing.
>
> You then took off your hat before the audience. Each tickler had his own gesture for removing his hat with a little flourish; that was part of his attitude, too. You took out your silk handkerchief, shook it out and dusted off the piano stool.
>
> Now, with your coat off, the audience could admire your full-back, or box-back, suit, cut with very square shoulders. The pants had about fourteen-inch cuffs and broidered clocks.
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> Full-back coats were always single-breasted, to show your gold watch fob and chain. Some ticklers wore a horseshoe tiepin in a strong single colored tie and a gray shirt with black pencil stripes.
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> We all wore French, Shriner and Urner or Hanan straight or French last shoes with very pointed toes, or patent-leather turnup toes, in very narrow sizes. . . . They cost from twelve to eighteen dollars a pair. . . . [Fred Tunstall] was a real dandy. I remember he had a Norfolk coat with eighty-two pleats in the back. When he sat down to the piano, he'd slump a little in a half hunch, and those pleats would fan out real pretty. That coat was long and flared at the waist. It had a very short belt sewn on the back. His pants were very tight.
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> He had a long neck, so he wore a high, stiff collar that came up under his chin with a purple tie. A silk handkerchief was always draped very carefully in his breast pocket. His side view was very striking.

Johnson stands with Duke Ellington, Count Basie, and Jelly Roll Morton among the seminal jazz figures. Curiously, many of the most influential jazz musicians have been pianist-composers. Johnson's principal admirers and pupils in the early twenties were Duke Ellington and Fats Waller. Ellington is now an institution, and as both pianist and composer he has affected Thelonious Monk, who in turn has spawned a host of lesser pianist-composers. Waller, an ironic master of self-parody, taught Count Basie, who became head of the Kansas City school as well as an unmistakable influence on John Lewis, another institution. Waller also made a lasting imprint on Art Tatum, a genuine virtuoso, and Tatum inspired—among countless others—Bud Powell, the widely followed bop pianist. For all this, Johnson was passé when he died. Seventy-five people attended his funeral. His career was a string of quick successes and slow-burning failures. Born in 1894, in New Brunswick, New Jersey, of a poor but solid family, Johnson picked up the piano from his mother and other informal teachers, and in his early teens became a reasonably good tickler. By the mid-twenties, he was a master pianist, songwriter ("If I Could Be with You One Hour Tonight," "Charleston," "Carolina Shout," "Old Fashioned Love"), and piano-roll maker. He was also writing music for revues and Hollywood shorts, playing in pit bands and onstage, making records as a bandleader and soloist, and performing in vaudeville. But Johnson, in the manner of the comedian lusting after the role of Hamlet, had dreams,

and around 1930 he retired to a house he had bought in Jamaica, Long Island. There he composed a couple of symphonies, an orchestral suite based on the "St. Louis Blues," and a one-act opera with a libretto by Langston Hughes. Some of these were performed, but none were recorded. However, one earlier orchestral piece, "Yamekraw," was performed as recently as last spring, in Washington. It belongs with "Rhapsody in Blue," and is artless, sentimental, and even Uncle Tomish. In the late thirties, John Hammond's Carnegie Hall "From Spirituals to Swing" concerts brought Johnson out of retirement, and he made a classic series of solo and small-band jazz recordings. In 1940, he suffered a stroke. Several years later, he was back again, appearing sadly and rather desultorily with Dixieland groups. In 1951, a second stroke permanently disabled him.

Although Johnson metamorphosed from a slim, dapper man with a long, narrow head into a bear with a profusion of lips and double chins, his style—give or take a little elaboration—remained much the same. All in all, he was the steadiest and most refined Harlem stride pianist. Luckey Roberts, who taught Johnson, was and is more showy, and there is a Fragonard quality in his slow playing. Willie the Lion Smith, a contemporary of Johnson, has a frightening rhythmic bark but not much melodic bite, which was generally true of Waller, a first-rate second-rate pianist. Many of Johnson's compositions reflect the Old South church-meeting atmosphere of his home when he was a child. His "Carolina Shout" and "The Mule Walk" are *dances*, and they have an exuberant, extrovert air. This cheerful openness flowed into Johnson's playing, which has little of the dark, in-turning concentration of Southern jazz musicians. Indeed, his piano often suggests the bounce of polkas and schottisches. In contrast to Jimmy Yancey, who wore his soul on his sleeve, Johnson played *at* the blues; he never seemed to take them seriously—an attitude shared by Waller and Art Tatum, both Northerners. But the emotional caution of Johnson's composing and playing was balanced by the glistening architecture of his style. One almost saw rather than heard what he played. When necessary, his left hand produced oompah patterns equalled only by Waller and Smith. These figures, though, were constantly relieved by offbeat chords, rests, and little melodic lines, all of which gave his oompah twice as much force. His right hand was brilliantly casual. He liked queer, broken arpeggios (Monk, Bud Powell), and rich, generously spaced chords (Tatum) that outlined the melody and then floated off like swans. He liked to decorate the melody with a furze of staccato, single-note lines, and he liked the crystal-goblet ring of the upper registers and the boom of the deepest octave. But he was never predictable. His chords were oddly placed (Monk again), and, just at the right moment, they dissolved into single notes or runs that in turn fell before brief, virtuoso breaks and arhythmic interludes (Tatum again). No matter how fast the tempo, Johnson never hurried (John Lewis). And no matter how slow the tempo, he never dragged (Basie). Most important, Johnson's solos, of whatever length, were not bound by measures and bridges and reprises but were wholes—an improvisational skill only recently rediscovered by the young abstract performers.

TWO welcome sets of Johnson reissues have now been put out—"Backwater Blues: The Stride Piano of James P. Johnson" (Riverside 151) and "James P. Johnson: Father of the Stride Piano" (Columbia CL 1780). They stretch from 1920 to 1939, forming a nearly complete picture of Johnson's career. The twelve numbers on the first record were done between 1920 and 1927 as piano rolls. Four ("Charleston," "Daintiness Rag," "It Takes Love to Cure the Heart's Disease," and "Caprice Rag") are by Johnson. By and large, the record reveals the flashy, stylized Johnson of the rent parties. Ragtime influences are still strong, particularly in "Daintiness Rag," "Caprice Rag," and "Baltimore Buzz." More impressive, though, are Johnson's left hand in "Vampin' Liza Jane," when he matches runs and single notes against right-hand slurs; his left-hand tremolos and right-hand staccato figures in "Don't Tell Your Monkey Man;" and, in "Gypsy Blues," his heavy dat-dat-dat right-hand chords and the easy, plopping left-hand single notes. "Backwater Blues," made in 1927, has a boogie-woogie bass, tremolos, and the porous stride attack that Albert Ammons and Pete Johnson sometimes used a decade later. It is an excellent example of Johnson balancing a blues on one finger and saying, in a mock-melancholy way, "Ah, yes, those *sad*, *sad* blues."

There are sixteen selections on the Columbia record. Five are piano solos from the twenties; one is a funny 1930 duet with Clarence Williams; five are 1939 piano solos; and five are small-band sides from the same year. The 1939 solos show Johnson at his peak. He is less mannered and fussy than he was in the twenties, and he uses more pronounced dynamics and rhythms. "If Dreams Come True," the best of the lot, has glassy out-of-tempo interludes and irresistible oompah passages, and "The Mule Walk" rolls with polyrhythms. "Blueberry Rhyme" has a rhapsodic Tatum quality. The small-band sides, made with Red Allen, J. C. Higginbotham, Gene Sedric, Al Casey, Johnny Williams or Pops Foster, and Sidney Catlett, fall below the small-band efforts Johnson made with Frankie Newton for Victor and with Sidney De Paris and Ben Webster for Blue Note. But there are good moments from Allen and Higginbotham and Catlett, the last of whom adopted an attack when he played with Johnson that was a delicate mixture of spoofing and respect. The piano solos from the twenties are creditable, though poorly recorded. Fortunately, Ellington's short eulogy of Johnson in the liner notes has none of the customary lollipop flavor of his public effusions. James P., a disciplined man, would be pleased.

—WHITNEY BALLIETT

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The New Yorker
May 11, 1963

Next month we will cover the recent visit to Toronto of Glenn Rowell. (Brought in to the Club 76 by John Maddox). We will also show some of the pictures taken by Mike Montgomery when he came with Tom Shea (both with wives) for our recording session. By that time I hope all of you will have ordered Tom's record. I know you will be as gassed as we are.

John A. Fisher,
Chairman.